

Caring for Yourself



Caring for a Veteran with an illness, injury or disability can take up a lot of time and energy. At times, your caregiving responsibilities may leave you feeling like you have no time left to charge your own batteries. Below are some tips to help you stay strong and attend to your own needs, which will keep you feeling healthier and in control.

- Ask for help.
 - Ask a friend to make dinner or a relative to help out for a little bit each week.
 - Make a list of ways others can help. When a friend asks, “What can I do?” have them choose from the list.
 - Don’t wait until you can’t handle it any more. Ask for and accept help on a regular basis.
 - Even if asking for help is hard, find at least one person or resource you can go to for help right away.
- Express your feelings.
 - Feeling frustrated, sad, angry or depressed is normal. You have a stressful job as a Family Caregiver. When you’re feeling this way:
 - Write your feelings down in a journal, or send an e-mail to a friend.
 - Talk about your feelings – with the Veteran you care for, a friend, relative, or counselor. You can also call VA’s Caregiver Support Line, 1-855-260-3274, to talk to a caring professional.
 - If there’s a song that expresses how you feel, give yourself a chance to sing it out loud.
 - Find other creative ways to express what you feel so you don’t keep it bottled up inside.



- Stay focused on your health.
 - It can be hard to eat a healthy diet, and to get regular physical activity and plenty of rest. To help stay on track, give yourself a goal: “This week I’ll take a 15-minute walk on three separate days.”
 - Learn about stress reduction techniques and make a point of applying them.
 - Don’t put off your own medical care. Talk with your doctor about getting regular vaccinations and make sure you receive your annual checkups.
- Learn about the Veteran’s condition.
 - Find out about the illness, injury or disability affecting the Veteran you care for so that you are not surprised when something new happens.
 - If you can, provide information to family and friends so they will know how best to support you.



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- Avoid isolation.
 - Pursue a hobby or take a class.
 - Join a reading or discussion group.
 - Become part of a community – whether in-person or online.
 - Talk with professionals.
 - Contact a VA social worker or your local social services agency to help you find out about Caregiver resources.
 - Call VA's Family Caregiver Support Line (1-855-260-3274).
 - Contact your local Caregiver Support Coordinator, who you can find by calling the Caregiver Support Line or visiting www.caregiver.va.gov.
 - Talk with an attorney or legal aid service about legal issues. Many areas have free or low-cost legal aid available.
 - Talk with an accountant about finances.
 - Find a counselor or therapist to help you deal with feelings.
 - Look for signs of burnout.
 - Not taking care of your own health, feeling lonely, crying or losing your temper more than usual are all signs that you may need to seek help.
 - Take an honest look at your use of sedatives and alcohol. Have a doctor or counselor help you evaluate your use.
 - Find someone to talk to if you feel discouraged, frustrated, trapped or over-burdened.
 - Seek professional help if you are depressed or thinking about suicide.
 - Reach out to VA's Caregiver Support Line for help (1-855-260-3274).
 - Take time for yourself.
 - Consider placing the Veteran you care for in respite care, home care or adult day health care so you can take a needed break.
 - Schedule regular time for yourself. Start small – plan to spend half an hour three times a week away from caregiving.
 - Even if you only have a few minutes free – give yourself a much-needed break. Check out our resource on [Making the Most of Your Limited Time for ideas](#).
 - Consider taking a vacation.
 - Be creative! Ask for help from friends or relatives and use community services to give yourself some time away.
 - Give yourself a treat.
 - Buy yourself a present, such as a favorite magazine or a new shirt.
 - Put your feet up and read a book in your favorite chair.
 - Order dinner from your favorite restaurant and have it delivered.
 - Buy yourself flowers.
 - Go to your local library or bookstore.
 - Go to the movies and order your favorite snack.
 - Investigate local services.
 - Find out if meals are delivered to home-bound individuals or seniors in your area.
 - Contact the Veteran's primary care provider or social worker, your Caregiver Support Coordinator or the local senior center, to help you find resources.
 - Find out about home health care, adult day health care or assisted living facilities. Even if you do not want to use one now, you may need to in the future.

Staying focused and fully charged is one of the most important things you can do for you and for the Veteran you care for. Caregiving can take a lot out of you. Remember to put some of that back in.

